

This checklist will help U.S. Army installation representatives to effectively handle complaints about public concerns. Whether in front of a group of neighborhood residents or answering the installation's complaint hotline, effective communication is essential.

Effectively handling complaints

Do:

- ☐ give your name
- ☐ act quickly once the complainant has left the building or hung up the phone
- ☐ get their details, e.g. names, addresses, telephone numbers, dates
- ☐ write down what they said and tell them you are recording their complaint
- ☐ listen
- ☐ accept complaints even if they are not about Army activities
- ☐ stay calm even if the complainant gets angry
- ☐ take the complainant seriously
- ☐ let the complainant have their say
- ☐ speak to the individual in person and do not rely solely on any written complaints or records of conversations
- ☐ treat the complainant with genuine empathy, courtesy, patience, honesty and fairness
- ☐ demonstrate to the customer that you clearly understand the full nature of their problem, by:
 - listening - do not jump to conclusions, apportion blame or becoming defensive
 - asking questions to clarify the situation
 - repeating what the speaker said or summarizing your understanding of the problem
- ☐ thank the complainant for raising their problems with you
- ☐ end any phone conversation, or community meeting, with the lines of communication open.

When it comes right down to it, other things being relatively equal, the human dynamic is more important than the technical dimensions of the deal.” - Stephen R. Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Don't:

- ☐ argue, commiserate or offer any promises
- ☐ talk or explain, just listen
- ☐ get angry or become defensive
- ☐ pass the complainant on to another person
- ☐ accept abuse from a complainant (e.g. swearing)
- ☐ agree or disagree, accept or deny—simply record what they are saying and summarize
- ☐ ask them to complain in writing or in person or call back later
- ☐ deter people from making a complaint
- ☐ consider the complaint as a personal criticism
- ☐ use jargon when writing back to the complainant

Successfully handling complaints requires listening with empathy and responding accurately and quickly.

Generally, you should make it easy for the complainant to raise problems with you. Encourage ongoing, open communication when advertising

the complaint phone number and/or website, and in written responses to complainants. Say something like, “The Army welcomes comments from the community.” and “Every effort will be made to correct problems, mission permitting.”

Management of your complaint system is also important. Make sure someone is available to answer the complaint phone calls and have one person designated to manage problems that require additional follow up.

For help with community involvement activities, contact:

*Health Risk Communication Program
U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion
and Preventive Medicine*

5158 Blackhawk Rd.

Bldg. E5158

Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5403

<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/risk>

This checklist is part of *Noise Management—A Primer on Facilitating Community Involvement and Communicating with the Public*. This guide, along with its companion CD, can help you educate and engage stakeholders on and off your installation, and generate support for noise management activities.

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